



What is Meant When We Say Allah is Above What He Created

Imām Ibn Fūrāk al-Shāfiʿī

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Indeed, they have released a statement and they have said: 'In (*fī*) the east and in the west and in the heavens and in the earth.' It has been said that if this is valid then it means 'above' them (*fawqaha*). The use of the word *fī* (in) to mean *fawqa* (above) is clear in the language and prevalent. For example, we have His statement, Mighty and Majestic: **"You may travel about in (*fī*) the land..."** [Al-Tawba 9:2] i.e. above it. There is also His statement: **"...and have you crucified in (*fī*) palm trunks."** [Ṭaha 20:71] The scholars of *tafsīr* say that the meaning is 'on palm trunks', and based on this His statement: **"Or do you feel secure against Him Who is in (*fī*) heaven..."** [Al-Mulk 67:16] can be interpreted to mean *fawqa* (above) heaven. It is clear in the [Arabic] language that *fī* is used to mean *fawqa*. He, Blessed and Exalted, has also said: **"He is the Absolute Master over (*fawqa*) His slaves"** [Al-Anʿām 6:18] and He said: **"They fear their Lord above (*fawqa*) them."** [Al-Naḥl 16:50] The Muslims explain that Allah the Exalted is above His creation, and this takes precedence over the former [i.e. being *in* His creation]. Thus, His statement: **"It is He who is God in heaven and God on earth."** [Al-Zukhruf 43:84] is also interpreted to mean 'God above heaven and God above earth.' A verse of poetry also says that "the slave was being crucified in (*fī*) palm trunks" meaning *on* palm trunks.

Know that when we say that Allah, Mighty and Majestic, is above what He has created that does not mean that He is above in terms of a physical place, or that He has risen above physical places by a certain distance and He supervises these places by applying Himself to something from them. Rather, our saying that He is above them carries two senses; one of them means that He is the Absolute Master, in charge of them and establishing His all-encompassing power over them, as well as His comprehensive mastery over them and them being under his direction, progressing in accordance with His knowledge and His will. The second sense is that He is above them meaning He is distinct (*mubāyin*) of His creation. He is different in terms of

¹ For a biography please refer to: [http://www.livingislam.org/n/shf_e.html]

² Translated from on-line edition of *Kitāb Mushkil al-Ḥadīth wa Bayānihi*.

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His attributes and qualities, and that which is possible for temporal beings, such as defects, imperfection, incapacity, problems, and needs, are not befitting of Him at all and it is not possible for him to be attributed with any of them. It is also commonplace in the language that it is said that ‘so-and-so is above so-and-so’³, and what is meant is a higher rank and position. Allah, Mighty and Majestic, is above His creation in both senses while the third sense is impossible for him, which is, being confined in some direction, or in a specific place as opposed to another place.

Thus, when we say that He is above (*fawqa*) things in this sense we also interpret the statement that He is in (*fī*) them with the same meaning. We have already noted in the [Arabic] language that in (*fī*) and on (*‘alā*) can be used as synonyms as we have demonstrated in the examples from the Qur’ānic āyāt as well as poetry. What if someone asks: ‘If you allow for it be said that He is in (*fī*) heaven and in (*fī*) earth meaning that He is above (*fawqa*) them, do you also allow for it to be said that He is in (*fī*) everything with the interpretation you gave?’ It has been explained that we only use such language if it has been conveyed in traditions or revelation, and it is not for us to use analogy with regards to any of this terminology [when it is in relation to the Names and Attributes of Allah].



³ Translator: cf. Sūrah Yūsuf 12:76 – “Above (*fawqa*) every man of knowledge, there is someone more knowledgeable” and Sūrah Āl Imrān 3:55: “and to place those who follow you above (*fawqa*) those who disbelieve”